

My name is Becci James and I have just completed my MA in Applied Human Rights at The Helena Kennedy Institute for International Justice at Sheffield Hallam University.

My dissertation was on Human Rights and the Duty to reduce Homelessness in the UK. Researching international and domestic law and the duties of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

The predominant causes of homelessness are structural, including housing policies issues, lack of affordable housing, unemployment, poverty and wider policy developments ie closing hospitals and the structure and administration of housing benefits.

My analysis identified that it will help to reduce the number of homeless people getting evicted and the act provides additional duties increasing local authorities responsibilities and that everyone will be treated the same. Therefore single men will now be able to apply for support going forward, where as before they had to fend for themselves, so now everyone will be considered a priority.

However my conclusion is that 'the right to adequate housing' should be enshrined in UK domestic law and that the UK Government UK could also ratify the European Social Charter of 1996 which includes 'the right to housing' under article 31. Their failure to do so until now, indicates a reluctance to fully acknowledge the current UK housing crisis.

Also austerity cuts in the UK has caused significant benefit cuts and sanctions and people are unable to live to their means, many are evicted from their council social housing properties and now gone into the private rented sector. The average life of a homeless person in the UK is 48 years of age for males compared to 74 years dying 26 years younger and 43 for homeless women compared to 80 dying 37 years younger, this is unacceptable in 2018.

There is not enough accessible, affordable and available housing stock in the UK and local Authorities are not investing enough to build new social housing, relying on charities and the private sector to house the shortfall.

The private sector also needs to have 3 year tenancy agreements, as at then minute after 6 months they can be evicted and the standard of housing is often poorer in condition.

The UK Government is not meeting its state obligations and duty to care for the most vulnerable in society, therefore breaching an individuals basic human rights on multiple levels. Instead it criminalises individuals to deflect away from its own failings.

Also I think homelessness should be also a protected characteristic in the Equality Act of 2010 in the same respect as sex, disability, religion etc this would help for homeless people to be treated equally in the future, also encouraging private landlords to follow suit.

Also accurate and transparent homeless figures need to be recorded, as at the moment hidden homeless are not counted in then annual figures that the government collects every November through the National Audit. Rough sleeping figures from November 2017 was recorded as 4,751, however CRisis think it is more like 8,000 in addition to the 9,000 that sleep in tents, trains, buses and cars on a daily basis.

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